



Testimony of Andrew A. Feinstein  
Legislative Chair  
Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK)  
To Committee on Education  
February 20, 2026

Senator McCrory, Chairwoman Leeper, Senator Berthel, Representative Zupkus,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK), a statewide organization of parents, providers, advocates and attorneys fighting for excellent education for students with disabilities.

Four of us are appearing today on behalf of SEEK, each to cover a different aspect of the pending legislation. John Flanders, the President of SEEK, will testify on the need to create a state office to backfill for the hollowed-up federal Office for Civil Rights and will also discuss the need for the Department of Education to publish full complaint decisions with only the identity of the student redacted. Naomi Nova, SEEK's Vice President, will testify on the need for cameras in self-contained classrooms, the need to clarify and outlaw the use of seclusion, and the need to guarantee parents the right to have their experts observe in school. Stacey Tie, SEEK's secretary, will testify concerning needed changes in Public Act 25-67, specifically related to rate setting, the identity of implementers in the IEP document, and removing the restriction on SEED money going to contract employees.

I am here to testify on funding issues. Public education in Connecticut is seriously underfunded. Special education in Connecticut is grotesquely underfunded. We plead with this Legislature to do something about this. Rather than discussing how much more money is needed, I choose to discuss how that money is best applied.

One fact to keep in mind is that Connecticut ranks third in the nation in the percentage of K-12 funding that comes from local sources (57%, as opposed to a national average of 43%) and ranks 41<sup>st</sup> in K-12 funding that comes from the state (35%, as opposed to a national average of 45%). The state of Connecticut is failing local school districts and public school students by its parsimonious funding levels. Raising the foundation amount in the ECS formula would partly rectify this.

Until the passage of the big special education legislation (Public Act 25-67) last session, Connecticut was one of very few states that failed to appropriate any money directly to support special education in local school districts. There are now, in general terms, three pots of money that support special education. One is the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant, which supplies nearly \$2.5 billion to local districts under a complex formula, weighted toward districts with highest needs. This accounts for approximately 18% of the \$13.6 billion that is spent on K-12 education.

A second source of funding is the Excess Cost grant, which is \$221 million, or pays about 76% of the claims eligible under the statute, under a sliding scale formula. The Excess Cost grant is really an insurance policy that compensates school districts for extremely expensive programs for the most complicated students with disabilities. About 91% of the Excess Cost grant goes to out-of-district placements. In most districts, the Excess Cost grant kicks in for programs that cost more than \$100,000, while the average cost of an out-of-district placement is as high as \$160,000 in many districts.

A third source of funding comes from the Special Education Expansion and Development (SEED) grant and the High Quality Special Education Incentive Grant passed in Public Act 25-67. SEED is budgeted at \$30 million, while strict application of the formula would require an appropriation of \$191 million. This is the only funding that goes directly to support special education in district. These two grants, which are quite limited in their permissible uses, account for far less than 1% of the cost of special education.

Special Education Equity for Kids (SEEK) sees education of student with disabilities in their home districts as the highest priority. Therefore, we would like to see a substantial increase in SEED grant money, with the prohibition on any of the money being used for private providers deleted from the statute.

We have no objection to fully funding the Excess Cost grant, just as long as we understand that it does nothing to improve the quality of special education in district. Many municipalities need full funding of excess costs to balance their municipal budgets. Where the state has made a commitment, municipalities have the right to expect it to be kept.

As to ECS funding, we are in support of increasing the foundation amount, that has not been increased since 2013. Doing so would increase the total ECS funding level. In that 27% of that funding presumably goes to fund special education, increasing the foundation amount could increase the quality of special education.

We have three specific asks of this committee. First, the most egregious problem with special education is the critical staff shortage of teachers, related service personnel, and paraeducators. Basic economics says that where there is a dearth of a certain occupational category, you should pay more to attract more individuals to the field. That is precisely what we need to do in Connecticut. We need to create a state-funded system of supplemental pay or bonuses for shortage occupations.

Second, we need to make the SEED grant meaningful, so that districts can open programs and reduce outplacements. That means fully funding it and eliminating the restriction on funding programs that utilize contract personnel. Ms. Tie will discuss this more fully.

Third, the special education system works reasonably well for parents with the money to hire advocates and attorneys to fight for appropriate educational opportunities for their children. It does not work well for parents and guardians of limited means. There are a number of organizations that provide no cost or low cost advocacy support to parents - the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC), the Special Education Legal Fund (SELF), the Center for



Children's Advocacy (CCA) and various legal aid organizations. The Legislature should set up a means to fund these organizations and to fund new organizations to provide advocacy and litigation, if needed, for parents who cannot afford it on their own.

SEEK wants to work with you over the course of the session to provide the resources necessary to effectively educate students with disabilities.

